

Foods to Avoid during Pregnancy

Take care with some foods

There are some foods to avoid or take care with when you're pregnant because they might make you ill or harm your baby. Make sure you know the important facts about which foods you should avoid or take precautions with when you're pregnant.

Cheeses to avoid:



Don't eat mould-ripened soft cheese. You should also avoid soft blue-veined cheeses, such as:

- Danish blue
- gorgonzola
- roquefort

This is because soft cheeses are less acidic than hard cheeses and they contain more moisture, which means they can be an ideal environment for harmful bacteria, such as listeria, to grow in. Listeria infection can lead to miscarriage, stillbirth or severe illness in a newborn baby.

Cheeses that are safe to eat include:

- Cheddar
- Parmesan
- cottage cheese
- mozzarella
- feta
- cream cheese
- ricotta
- goats' cheese
- processed cheeses such as cheese spreads

Raw or partially cooked eggs

Make sure that eggs are thoroughly cooked until the whites and yolks are solid. This prevents the risk of salmonella food poisoning. Salmonella food poisoning is unlikely to harm your baby, but it can give you a severe bout of diarrhoea and vomiting. Avoid foods that contain raw and undercooked eggs, such as homemade mayonnaise.

Raw or undercooked meat

Cook all meat and poultry thoroughly so it is steaming hot and there is no trace of pink or blood. Take particular care with poultry, pork, sausages and minced meat, including burgers. Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a parasite that can be found in meat, soil, cat faeces and untreated water. If you are pregnant the infection can damage your baby, but it's important to remember that toxoplasmosis in pregnancy is very rare.

Cold cured meats

Cold cured meats include salami, parma ham, chorizo and pepperoni. Some countries advise pregnant women to avoid eating cold cured meats or smoked fish as there is a small risk of these foods harbouring listeria or the toxoplasma parasite that causes toxoplasmosis.

Liver products

Don't eat liver or liver products such as liver sausage, as they may contain a lot of vitamin A. Too much vitamin A can harm your baby.

Vitamin and fish oil supplements

Don't take high-dose multivitamin supplements, fish liver oil supplements or any supplements containing vitamin A.

Some types of fish

Don't eat shark, marlin and swordfish, and limit the amount of tuna you eat to:

- no more than two tuna steaks a week (about 140g cooked or 170g raw each), or
- four medium-sized cans of tuna a week (about 140g when drained)

These types of fish contain high levels of mercury that can damage your baby's developing nervous system. Don't eat more than two portions of oily fish a week. Oily fish includes fresh tuna (but not canned tuna), salmon, mackerel, sardines and trout.

Raw shellfish

Eat cooked rather than raw shellfish (including mussels, lobster, crab, prawns, scallops and clams) as they can contain harmful bacteria and viruses that can cause food poisoning. Cold pre-cooked prawns are fine.

Sushi

It's fine to eat raw or lightly cooked fish in dishes such as sushi when you're pregnant as long as any raw wild fish used to make it has been frozen first. This is because occasionally wild fish contains small parasitic worms that could make you ill. Freezing kills the worms and makes raw fish safe to eat. Cooking will also kill them.

The safest way to enjoy sushi is to choose the fully cooked or vegetarian varieties, which can include:

- cooked seafood, for example fully cooked eel (unagi) or shrimp (ebi)
- vegetables, for example cucumber (kappa) maki
- avocado, for example California roll
- fully cooked egg

Milk and yogurt

Stick to pasteurised or UHT (ultra-heat treated) milk – sometimes also called long-life milk. If only raw (unpasteurised) milk is available, boil it first. Don't drink unpasteurised goats' or sheep's milk or eat foods made from them, such as soft goats' cheese.

All types of yogurt, including bio, live, low-fat etc are fine. Just check with homemade yogurt that it is made with pasteurised milk - and if not, avoid it.

Ice cream

Soft ice creams should be fine to eat when you're pregnant, as they are processed products made with pasteurised milk and eggs, so any risk of salmonella food poisoning has been eliminated.

Foods with soil on them

Wash fruit, vegetables and salads to remove all traces of soil and visible dirt.

Caffeine

High levels of caffeine can result in babies having a low birth weight, which can increase the risk of health problems in later life. Too much caffeine can also cause miscarriage.

Caffeine is naturally found in lots of foods, such as coffee, tea and chocolate, and is added to some soft drinks and energy drinks. Some cold and flu remedies also contain caffeine. Talk to your midwife, doctor or pharmacist before taking these remedies.

